

FFA Members Devote Time, Effort and Energy to Help Others

LEXINGTON, Ky. – As more than 2,000 state FFA members made their way to the recent annual Kentucky FFA Convention last week, hundreds came a little early to participate in community service activities across the area.

The Day of Service is something that has become synonymous with FFA and the organization's dedication to helping communities at both state and national conventions.

This year, members participated in an array of activities in a variety of settings throughout Fayette and surrounding counties.

Webster County advisors Jarrod Hankins and Margo Bruce brought their students to nearby Paris, Kentucky to help at a horse farm.

It's no coincidence the farm is called Hankins Tennessee Walking Horses since it is owned by Hankin's father.

But for many farms, a helping hand from FFA members is welcomed not only to do chores but to allow those students to see different types of farming operations.

"When the Day of Service began, we wanted to participate and I felt like there were businesses that were more than willing to cooperate in the event but maybe not have as big a need," said Hankins. "When I was younger, I would come up and visit my dad during the summer and work on the farm so it was one of the first things I thought of for a community service project. I checked with the state FFA folks to see if we could count this and now we've been coming to spend the day on the horse farm for the past few years."

Hankins added that he thought it would be a little more educational for the students to see the horses and ride them, if they wanted, while also experiencing this area of agriculture first hand and helping someone he knows who needs the help.

Bruce said an experience like this becomes even more special as more and more students involved in FFA come from a non-farming background.

"What we are seeing now is even a smaller population of students from the farm," she said. "But they make real connections when they see the vastness of agriculture. It's not just about farming and they see that even more by being here."

Hankins said for those in agriculture, they know of its diversity, but for students coming to a bigger city like Lexington, it allows them to see agri-businesses like the Kentucky Proud Store, which is located at the site of the convention, then, 15 minutes away, they see a horse farm in the country where they get a hands-on experience in horse production.

"What I always tell the freshmen is, it's not all about farming anymore but farming will always be the hub and everything else spawns from that," he said. "All the businesses, all the transportation, the sales and marketing industry, all that comes from the hub which is the production segment. We always try to make sure the students understand that."

Ben Hornback, a recent graduate of Webster County High School and Elizabeth Waller, a sophomore student, made the trip to this year's convention and helped out at the horse farm. For



Members of the Webster County FFA chapter participated in the Day of Service by helping out on a horse farm in Bourbon County.

Waller, it was her first trip to the event and for Hornback, his last as a high school student.

Hornback said as he prepares to go to Murray State University in the fall, the community service hours looked good on college applications.

“I can gladly say that FFA has helped in getting scholarships and being accepted to college,” he said. “Giving back to the community is something really good and a great aspect of my life and it’s something FFA is all about.”

Waller said she has participated in community service projects through her church so participating in the Day of Service was not something new for her.

“I think it’s great to be involved in an organization that can help you out with community service hours for college,” she said. “Watching the senior officers graduate this year and having them tell me all their memories and the fun they’ve had on these projects, I can see that it’s going to have a great impact on my life and it’s something I will carry with me after high school.”

In a completely different setting, students from the Lawrence County FFA chapter made their way to the Aviation Museum of Kentucky located at Lexington’s Bluegrass Airport to help with landscaping.

Melissa Branham, the chapter advisor said her group participates in community service projects in their home area with goals at the local chapter, regional, state and national levels.

“Once the students do this, it leads them to be better citizens,” she said. “We try to keep the students busy all summer and give them something to do.”

Branham added that her students, being involved in FFA are learning so much more than just agriculture education; they’re learning community service, leadership and skills needed to move forward past high school.

Lawrence County’s outgoing FFA chapter president Brandy Blackburn said she was attending her fourth convention and the second year of participating in the Day of Service.

“I really like to help the community whether at home or here,” she said. “I think this helps us to get and involved and interact with everyone.”

Blackburn, who also served as a regional officer, added that being involved with FFA has given her many skills including being a better communicator and helping her grow as a leader.

“I want to be able to help others rather than just be worried about myself,” she said.

Maelyn Huff is the current president of the Lawrence County chapter. Being a horse owner, she thought ag classes and FFA would be something good in which to get involved.

“I think this is a good experience for all us. This is the first time for our new officer team to



Two Webster County FFA members worked to repair a fence near the entrance to the horse farm.



er helped with
Kentucky.

be together and this was a good opportunity for us to bond,” she said.

Alexandria Adams is a recent graduate of Lawrence County High School and was attending her third state convention. She said for the past two years, the chapter has participated in a lot of community service projects.

“We’ve always done something. We have an FFA garden each year giving some of the produce to the community and selling some for (the chapter),” she said.

Adams added that the group always has a good time at the convention and works hard.

David Riggins, the executive director of the Aviation Museum said the museum depends almost entirely on volunteer help and when the call came asking if he could use some help from FFA members, he was more than glad to accept.

“They worked admirably here today and students who are interested in being in programs that provide community service, that tells me a lot about them,” he said. “They are interested in helping, they are interested in learning and that’s what we are all about here, helping kids learn not only about aviation but helping in the community.”

The museum holds summer aviation camps for students every year in addition to the ones that come through the museum during the school year.

“I’ve always heard of FFA and know the students involved are interested in their communities and learning everything they can so I wouldn’t be surprised to see some of them back again,” he said.



Maelyn Huff, president of the Lawrence County FFA chapter, shoveled mulch at the Aviation Museum. In the background is a Marine jet that belongs to the museum.